

Testimony Regarding Raised Bill No. 6572

Respectfully Submitted by Rabbi Donna Berman, Executive Director, Charter Oak Cultural Center

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and Members of the Judiciary Committee,

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony.

I moved from to Connecticut from New York 15 years ago and, frankly, have never felt more proud to live in this state than I do now as two bills protecting the rights and liberties of people who are experiencing homelessness are before the legislature: H.B. No. 6572, An Act Concerning Intimidation Based On Bigotry Or Bias Against a Homeless Person. and S.B. No. 896, An Act Concerning a Homeless Person's Bill of Rights, which will be heard later this week.

This is a glorious and noble moment for Connecticut. Both of these actions will benefit all the residents of our state, making Connecticut a more just and humane place and, at the same time, thrusting us on the national stage as we set an example for how to care for the most vulnerable among us that, hopefully, the rest of the country will follow.

The bill before you today, which proposes "To include within the offense of intimidation based on bigotry or bias the act of a person intimidating or harassing another person because of the actual or perceived homelessness of such other person," is essential. We who are lucky enough to live in our own homes and apartments, can lock our doors, turn on an alarm system and go to sleep feeling secure. We enjoy the safety of a consistent four walls around us. Those without homes lack these fundamental things. Both the elements and the hostility we all fear are a constant risk for them.

There are always people, who for their own psychological reasons, act out their wounds by preying on those in the minority, on those who are considered "different." These acts of violence are based on hatred of a group, i.e. they are based on bigotry. Violence against people who are homeless is an expression of bigotry, of hatred for the poor and downtrodden. It must be treated as the act of hate it is. Hate crimes are a blight on our society. People experiencing homelessness are doubly impacted because they have little or no resources for warding off, gaining protection and healing from such attacks.

I, therefore, urge you to pass H.B. No. 6572 so that our homeless brothers and sisters, already so at risk, will have added protection and the knowledge that their well-being and their lives matter to their fellow citizens.

Thank you.